

by **Stefan Molyneux**

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Two objections constantly recur whenever the subject of dissolving the State arises. The first is that a free society is only possible if people are perfectly good or rational. In other words, citizens need a centralized State because there are evil people in the world.

The first and most obvious problem with this position is that if evil people exist in society, they will also exist within the State – and be far more dangerous thereby. Citizens are able to protect themselves against evil individuals, but stand no chance against an aggressive State armed to the teeth with police and military might. Thus the argument that we need the State because evil people exist is false. If evil people exist, the State *must* be dismantled, since evil people will be drawn to use its power for their own ends – and, unlike private thugs, evil people in government have the police and military to inflict their whims on a helpless (and usually disarmed!) population.

Logically, there are four possibilities as to the mixture of good and evil people in the world:

1. all men are moral
2. all men are immoral
3. the majority of men are moral, and a minority immoral
4. the majority of men are immoral, and a minority moral

(A perfect balance of good and evil is statistically impossible!)

In the first case (all men are moral), the State is obviously not needed, since evil cannot exist.

In the second case (all men are immoral), the State cannot be permitted to exist for one simple reason. The State, it is generally argued, must exist because there are evil people in the world who desire to inflict harm, and who can only be restrained through fear of State retribution (police, prisons, *etc.*). A corollary of this argument is that the less retribution these people fear, the more evil they will do. However, the State itself is not subject to any force, but is a law unto itself. Even in Western democracies, how many policemen and politicians go to jail? Thus if evil people wish to do harm but are only restrained by force, then society can never permit a State to exist, because evil people will immediately take control of that State, in order to do evil and avoid retribution. In a society of pure evil, then, the only hope for stability would be a state of nature, where a general arming and fear of retribution would blunt the evil intents of disparate groups.

The third possibility is that most people are evil, and only a few are good. If that is the case, then the State *also* cannot be permitted to exist, since the majority of those in control of the State will be evil, and will rule over the good minority. Democracy in particular cannot be permitted to exist, since the minority of good people would be subjugated to the democratic will of the evil majority. Evil people, who wish to do harm without fear of retribution, would inevitably take control of the State, and use its power to do their evil free of that fear. Good people do not act morally because they fear retribution, but because they love goodness and peace of mind – and thus, unlike evil people, have little to gain by controlling the State. And so it is certain that the State will be controlled by a majority of evil people, and will rule over all, to the detriment of all moral people.

The fourth option is that most people are good, and only a few are evil. This possibility is subject to the same problems outlined above, notably that evil people will always want to gain control over the State, in order to shield themselves from retaliation. This option changes the appearance of democracy, however: because the majority of people are good, evil power-seekers must lie to them in order to gain power, and then, after achieving public office, will immediately break faith and pursue their own corrupt agendas, enforcing their wills with the police and military. (This is the current situation in democracies, of course.) Thus the State remains the greatest prize to the most evil men, who will quickly gain control over its awesome power – and so the State cannot be permitted to exist in this scenario either.

It is clear, then, that there is no situation under which a State can logically be allowed to exist. The only possible justification for the existence of a State would be if the majority of men are evil, but all the power of the State is always and forever controlled by a minority of good men. This situation, while interesting theoretically, breaks down logically because:

1. the evil majority would quickly outvote the minority or overpower them through a coup;
2. there is no way to ensure that only good people would always run the State; and,
3. there is absolutely no example of this having ever occurred in any of the dark annals of the brutal history of the State.

The logical error always made in the defense of the State is to imagine that any collective moral judgments being applied to citizens *is not also being applied to the group which rules over them*. If 50% of people are evil, then at least 50% of people ruling over them are evil (and probably more, since evil people are always drawn to power). Thus the existence of evil can never justify the existence of the State. If there is no evil, the State is unnecessary. If evil exists, the State is far too dangerous to be allowed existence.

Why is this error always made? There are a number of reasons, which can only be touched on here. The first is that the State introduces itself to children in the form of public school teachers who are considered moral authorities. Thus is the association of morality and authority with the State first made – which is reinforced through years of repetition. The second is that the State never teaches children about the root of its power – force – but instead pretends that it is just another social institution, like a business or a church or a charity. The third is that the prevalence of religion has always blinded men to the evils of the State – which is why the State has always been so interested in furthering the interests of churches. In the religious world-view, absolute power is synonymous with perfect goodness, in the form of a deity. In the real political world of men, however, increasing power always means increasing evil. With religion, also, all that happens must be for the good – thus, fighting encroaching political power is fighting the will of the deity. There are many more reasons, of course, but these are among the deepest.

It was mentioned at the beginning of this article that people generally make *two* errors when confronted with the idea of dissolving the State. The first is believing that the State is necessary because evil people exist. The second is the belief that, in the absence of a State, any social institutions which arise will inevitably take the place of the State. Thus, dispute resolution organizations (DRO's), insurance companies and private security forces are all considered potential cancers which will swell and overwhelm the body politic.

This view arises from the same error outlined above. If all social institutions are constantly trying to grow in power and enforce their wills on others, then *by that very argument a centralized State cannot be allowed to exist*. If it is an iron law that groups always try to gain power over other groups and individuals, then that power-lust will not end if one of them wins, but will spread across society until slavery is the norm. In other words, the only hope for individual freedom is for a proliferation of groups to exist, each with the power to harm each other, and so all afraid of each other, and more or less peaceable thereby.

It is very hard to understand the logic and intelligence of the argument that, in order to protect us from a group that might overpower us, we should support a group that has already overpowered us. It is similar to the statist argument regarding private monopolies – that citizens should create a State monopoly because they are afraid of monopolies. It does not take a keen vision to see through such nonsense.

What is the evidence for the view that decentralized and competing powers promote peace? In other words, are there any facts that we can draw on to support the idea that a balance of power is the only chance that the individual has for freedom?

Organized crime does not provide many good examples, since gangs so regularly corrupt, manipulate and use the power of the State police to enforce their rule, and so cannot be said to be operating in a state of nature. A more useful example is the fact that no leader has ever declared war on another leader who possesses nuclear weapons. In the past, when leaders felt themselves immune from retaliation, they were more than willing to kill off their own populations by waging war. Now that they are themselves subject to annihilation, they are only willing to attack countries that cannot fight back.

This is an instructive lesson on why political leaders require disarmed and dependent populations – and a good example of how the fear of reprisal inherent in a balanced system of decentralized and competing powers is the only proven method of securing and maintaining personal liberty. Fleeing from imaginary phantoms into the protective prison of the State will only ensure the destruction of the very liberties that make life worth living.

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